

VERB_{TM} Opens Door to World of Physical Activities for Youth

Blading. Kicking. Climbing. Biking. Dancing. Skating. Jumping. Running.

These VERBs, and thousand of others, will take on a new meaning for children this year as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announces the launch of a planned, five-year national, multicultural campaign to promote physical activities among 9- to 13-year-olds (also known as *tweens*) and the people who influence them.

Officially known as VERB.TM It's what you do., the campaign is designed to better the habits of tweens, many of whom now favor video games, Internet surfing, and television over physical activity involvement that result in good health and a positive self image. Currently, tweens spend an average of 4.5 hours each day in front of a screen, which is up 21 minutes from 1999, according to the 5th Annual Survey of Parents and Children conducted by the Anneberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania.

The campaign encourages tweens to find a VERB or several VERBs that fit their personalities and interests and to use them as a launching pad to better health and making regular physical activity a lifetime pursuit.

Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Tommy G. Thompson says he finds the VERB. It's what you do. campaign impactful because it speaks to children of all socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds — including African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders and Hispanics/Latinos — in a language that children understand.

“There is no doubt that America's youth are at risk and need encouragement to increase physical activity,” said Thompson. “The percentage of young people who are overweight has doubled in the past 20 years. That's why the VERB. It's what you do. campaign is so crucial and such a great complement to the President's fitness agenda. Americans need to become more active, and it's so important for children to develop good habits in order to avoid the chronic diseases that are hurting the collective health of our country. I'd like to see children across the country exploring positive physical

activities that appeal to their self-interests. As a result, we will see healthier children with better self-esteem.”

The Evidence

Children who are physically active are better able to meet the demands of daily physical activity and experience greater self-esteem, confidence, discipline, school achievement, social connectedness, and positive family relationships than their sedentary peers.

But the most important aspect of physical activity among children is that it plays an enormous role in helping youth avoid chronic obesity-related disease.

Consider the evidence about the growing ill health of American children—

- Forty percent of children between the ages of 5 and 8 are obese or have high blood pressure or cholesterol levels.
- Type II diabetes, unheard of in young adults 10 to 15 years ago, is increasing dramatically across the United States.
- Three-quarters of obese teens are unable to change their habits and remain obese in adulthood.

Experts cite a lack of physical activity as the key factor in obesity and obesity-related disease in children. And, while parents could once rely upon schools to provide their children with some form of physical education, the reality is that today few schools even offer, much less require, an opportunity for children to participate in positive physical activity. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently reported that only 25 percent of eighth-graders are required to take physical education, and by 12th grade only five percent of students are required to take physical education.

Importantly, the CDC has taken the lack of direction youth receive about physical activities into consideration in developing the VERB campaign.

“Children need encouragement and ideas on how to get active and off the couch, and community support to help make this happen,” said Mike Greenwell, director of communications for CDC’s chronic disease center. “The VERB. It’s what you do. campaign gives children concrete examples of how to get active in a fun, cool and meaningful way and it will give children role models, such as famous athletes or musicians or dancers, who they can look up to and see firsthand the benefits of physical activity.”

How to Learn More

The integrated VERB. It's what you do. campaign uses advertising, marketing, events and partnership activities to ensure that campaign messages reach children whenever they are looking for something positive to do. Through multicultural media partnerships, the campaign is designed to reach children in all socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds — including specific outreach for African Americans, Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders, Native Americans and Hispanic/Latinos. The VERB Web site, www.VERBparents.com, is a resource for busy parents looking for ways to encourage physical activities among tweens and discourage unhealthy, risky behaviors. For more information about the campaign see www.cdc.gov/youthcampaign or visit the tween Web site at www.VERBnow.com.

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